

State Representative Earl Harris

Helping Hoosier Families

113th Indiana General Assembly, Spring 2004

Session Report



Job
Creation



Protecting
Children



Prescription
Assistance





Rep. Harris (left) works on legislation with Rep. Bob Kuzman on the House floor.

113th General Assembly Ends

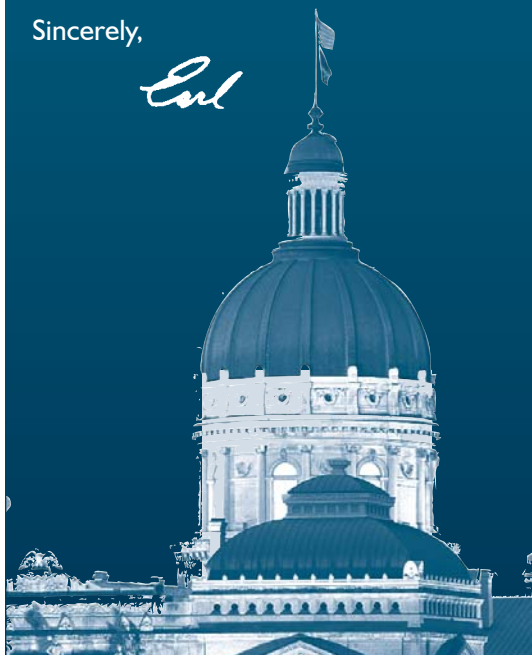
Dear Friends,

The 2004 short session of the Indiana General Assembly has ended. I have detailed several important pieces of legislation in this newsletter, including job creation, children's safety issues and increased access to affordable prescription drugs.

I hope you find this information useful, and I will keep you updated over the next few months on other legislation that should have a positive impact on you and your family. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about state government.

Sincerely,

A stylized signature of Eric Holcomb.



Creating Hoosier Jobs



Protecting and creating Hoosier jobs and businesses were among the issues of most concern in the 2004 General Assembly. Three bills and a resolution were passed that will aid in the retention and creation of jobs as well as encourage business development and corporate responsibility.

House Resolution 47 calls on the president and Congress to address a growing trade imbalance that has resulted in the loss of more than 2 million manufacturing jobs in the U.S. since 2001. It asks that **trade agreements require that corporations pay fair and competitive wages**, respect the rights of workers to unionize, and adopt workplace safety and anti-pollution standards equal to those in our country. The resolution also encourages the federal government to **provide economic incentives to sectors that have seen record job losses** due to NAFTA, and address the adverse effects on trade caused by countries that artificially lower the value of their currency relative to the dollar.

House Bill 1080 will help **stimulate Indiana's economy** by providing a price preference to Indiana businesses for public works and procurement contracts. This piece of legislation will focus on Indiana companies first as suppliers for goods and services the state is interested in purchasing.

House Bill 1434 will **benefit low-income businesses** by fostering economic development opportunities by providing grants for training and technical assistance. The microenterprise partnership program created under the bill will provide assistance to businesses with fewer than five employees.

House Bill 1365 will make the state's research and development tax credit permanent, extend the life of the Hoosier Business Investment Tax Credit and create a new fund to encourage investment in new technology. It also calls for a study of **eliminating corporate tax loopholes in current Indiana law** that cause tax increases on Hoosier homeowners and businesses.

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Helping Hoosier Families



Protecting Children

Legislators Address Safety Issues

During the 2004 session, several bills were passed to help protect children from abuse and neglect, and keep them safe in automobiles.

• **House Bill 1194** will provide tools to protect children from abuse or neglect. Criminal history checks will be required for each person who resides in a home in which a child is to be placed before the child is placed there. Child Protective Services (CPS) reports may now conclude if abuse or neglect is "indicated," as well as "substantiated" or "unsubstantiated." There will be an additional public disclosure in cases where a child dies as a result of abuse or neglect. A statewide group will be created under the bill to investigate sudden and/or unexpected deaths of children.

• **House Bill 1245** will levy tougher penalties against people who neglect a child who ends up dying as a result of the crime. The bill will increase the penalty for neglect of a dependent to a Class A felony if the neglect results in

the death of a child. Penalties will be increased for contributing to the delinquency of a minor if a person 21 years or older provides alcohol or a controlled substance to a minor, and the consumption of that alcohol or drug is determined to cause a death of any person.

• **Senate Bill 194** will provide added protections for all children in a home where abuses have taken place.

• **House Bill 1098** will require anyone who operates a motor vehicle with a passenger who is less than 8 years of age to place the child in a restraint system. Passengers between 8 and 16 years old will be required to wear a seat belt. Studies have indicated that child restraint systems can help prevent injuries caused when children do not properly fit in a safety belt.

In addition, the bill will create a Child Restraints System Account that will make grants to private and public organizations to purchase and distribute child restraint systems such as booster seats at minimal or no charge.



Medication Savings

Hoosiers Gain Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs

Legislators also worked hard to protect Hoosiers from the rising costs of prescription drugs. Under a plan approved this session, more than 400,000 Hoosiers would gain access to affordable prescription drugs, with many more qualifying in years to come.

House Bill 1265 enables the state to set up an aggregate prescription drug purchasing program for a certain category of individuals to negotiate the prices

of prescription drugs from pharmaceutical companies. **Indiana will also be able to enter into joint purchasing agreements with other states, gaining added bargaining power.**

People who are eligible for the program will receive the savings when they fill their prescriptions at their local drugstores. This is intended to be a pilot program which, if successful, will be extended to more people in the future.

Helping Hoosier Families



Representative Earl Harris (right) discusses legislation with Speaker Bauer at the Speaker's podium in the chamber.

Contact
Representative
Earl Harris
District 2

Statehouse
200 W. Washington
Indianapolis, IN 46204
1-800-382-9842

Online
H2@in.gov
www.in.gov/H2

Additional Bills Passed

There were several other significant pieces of legislation passed by the General Assembly.

House Bill 1029 will allow a custodial parent to bring a court action to **recover delinquent child support payments** by intercepting the state income tax return of the parent responsible for the obligation.

House Bill 1229, called The Indiana Homeowner Protection Act, places **tougher restrictions on the practice called predatory lending**. Homeowners will be protected from overpriced loans with unreasonable terms that often are impossible to pay back, placing people at risk of losing their homes through foreclosure.

House Bill 1449 will help **restore the constitutionality of Indiana's curfew law** by including provisions that protect minors who are exercising First Amendment rights.

House Bill 1178 will allow courts to create a program **permitting volunteers to become advocates for seniors**. Probate courts will be allowed to appoint trained and supervised volunteers to serve as guardians for a limited time to incapacitated or protected elderly who are at-risk inpatients in health care facilities in Indiana.

House Bill 1306 will allow members, survivors, and beneficiaries of the **Public Employees' Retirement Fund (PERF)** and Teacher's Retirement Fund (TRF) to receive a **cost-of-living adjustment** beginning in 2005.

House Bill 1171 creates a statewide **Stroke Prevention Task Force** to develop several prevention initiatives. The task force will develop and implement a statewide public education program and provide specific prevention strategies for healthcare professionals, and guidelines on helping and handling stroke patients.

House Bill 1044 enforces a mandatory \$5,000 fine for any employee of the Indiana Department of Correction or a penal facility who is caught **trafficking tobacco products** with an inmate.

Rep. Earl Harris

Indiana House of Representatives
200 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

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